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ABSTRACT

At Simon's Rock, capable 11th and 12th graders are admitted to an accelerated college-level program in which they can obtain a B.A. degree in four years. The Evaluation Office of the college is responsible for studying the cognitive and effective development of students at any college. A longitudinal study was begun in 1973 involving tracking of students while at the college and after graduation. Focal questions for the project have been: (1) How do Simon's Rock first graduating class' students compare in academic and emotional maturity with students who are on the average two years older and who are entering the freshman class at traditional four-year liberal arts colleges?; (2) Does psychological maturity predict successful adjustment at an early college?; and (3) What impact does the early college experience have on individual development? (Editor/MSE)

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SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS OF RESULTS

OFFICE OF EVALUATION

1972-1975

Since 1972, the evaluation office has been involved in the assessment of student development at Simon's Rock and in the study of the factors that underlie successful academic and social adjustment at an early college. The focal questions for the evaluation project have been:

1) How do Simon's Rock Class I students compare in academic and emotional maturity with students who are on the average two years older and who are entering the freshman class at traditional four-year liberal arts colleges?

2) Does psychological maturity predict successful adjustment at an early college?

3) What impact does the early college experience, as it is conceived and implemented at Simon's Rock, have on individual student development?

An additional evaluation objective that has become increasingly important as we approach June, 1976, the date of our first B.A. graduates, is the post-graduation follow-up of Simon's Rock students, with a focus on the readiness of our students for making educational and vocational decisions and their success in fulfilling stated career goals.

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Results from evaluation testing indicate that the 1972, 1973, 1974, and 1975 Class I students (approximately 250 students, in all), as a group, are above average on measures of academic achievement and critical thinking ability when compared to high school senior and college freshmen norms. All four classes scored at or above average on measures of analytic and verbal ability. Furthermore, there is evidence that the academic quality of incoming students has been gradually improving since 1972, particularly among the male students, many of whom seem to be attracted to the now superior science programs at Simon's Rock. In the entering class of 1975, over half the new students scored in the top quartile of college freshmen norms on critical thinking ability. An analysis was undertaken to determine how well the ability measures predicts grades in the Transitions Year (i.e., Class I) courses. In 1974, critical thinking ability successfully predicted grades in all of the first year science and social science courses (with correlations ranging from .59 to .85) but, with one exception, did not predict grades in any of the humanities or arts Transition Year courses.

In addition to the demonstrated academic readiness for college-level work, Simon's Rock students have been found to be well above average in terms of academic aspirations. In response to questions concerning highest degree aspired to, 80% of the 1973 class, 77% of the 1974 class, and 83% of the 1975 class indicated that they planned on graduated study, obtaining an M.A. or a higher degree. Based on information from questionnaires concerning self-image and life values, Simon's Rock students are above average in their self-reported independence from their family. They see themselves as stubborn, original, and intellectually well-above average. They

stress a self-originated, humanitarian work ethic based on self-expression and concern for others rather than adhering to a work ethic based on traditional values of making money, becoming an authority, and having influence. In sum, Simon's Rock students tend to have an idealistic, perhaps somewhat unrealistic, view of themselves and the world, but are, after all, relatively young people with unstable identities and untested perspectives on the larger social issues.

The important issue of the psychological maturity of our students has, of course, been of primary concern to us as we have formulated our academic and social programs. Are 16 year-olds that different emotionally and psychologically from 18 year olds? If they are, what are the teaching and everyday living problems unique to the age group? What is the meaning of the college experience to the 16 year old? And, does entering college at age sixteen in any way interfere with or accelerate normal developmental processes? Results from evaluation testing have provided answers to some of these questions, but we are only beginning to answer others.

Independent assessment of student psychological maturity (that is, not based on self-report) has been undertaken by means of Loevinger's empirical measure of ego developmental stage, a measure which allows assessment of impulse control, character(moral) development, self-concept, interpersonal relations, and cognitive complexity. Ego development is conceived as proceding through an invariant sequence of stages and at any given age one can expect to find individuals who are more and less advanced in the developmental sequence. Results based on the analysis of the 1972, 1973, 1974, and 1975 students indicate that our students are distributed all along the developmental continuum and are, as a group, somewhat

less advanced psychologically than comparable groups of 18 year old college freshmen. However, our incoming 16 year olds are very similar to 16 year old age norms as far as distribution along the developmental continuum is concerned. Until 1975, Simon's Rock has had its share of very immature and very mature 16 year olds. The 1975 class, however, appears to be different from the other classes studied in that they are more homogeneous in terms of psychological maturity. There are many fewer students at the extremes of the developmental continuum and many more students who can be described as at the "conformist" stage, a mid-stage in which respect for societal norms, concern over social acceptability, conventional outlooks, and respect for authority are primary characteristics. Whether this marked shift in the nature of the Class I students at Simon's Rock is indicative of our own admission policies, our applicants, or changes in American youth is not clear to us at present.

Psychological maturity is quite an important factor in the kind of social adjustment made during the first year at Simon's Rock, but has little to do with academic performance and grades in the Transition Year. The least mature students(lowest developmental stages) are the most likely to stress partying and social life over their studies, least likely to become involved in extracurricular activities and community governance, the least responsive and most critical of the Dolliver Seminars which are discussions focused on value clarification, and the most likely to be brought before Judicial Committee and receive severe penalities. Faculty tend to perceive these immature students as lacking personal investment in their academic work and as sloppy, erratic, even flippant in class. However, it should

be stressed that the academic standing of these students does not seem to suffer whatever their attitude In contrast, the students classified as the most mature psychologically(the highest developmental stages) express a seriousness about their studies unseen in the other students, are active and constructive community members, but ironically may be somewhat isolated and unhappy in an interpersonal sense. One of the most important issues to have emerged from data such as these is the question of the adjustment problems of the very mature 16 year old on an early college campus where most of his/her cohorts are psychologically younger. A further issue that has become evident as we have examined our results is that program planning for the Transition Year must take into account the considerable diversity in maturity, needs, and expectations of the incoming students.

Faculty were polled in 1974 concerning their perceptions of the academic and psychological readiness of Class I students for college level work. With regard to academic ability, the large majority of facutly felt Simon's Rock 16 year olds compared favorably to college freshmen elsewhere. However, the faculty felt the students as a whole were psychologically less mature, and approximately two-thirds of the faculty felt adjustments were necessary in teaching our relatively younger students, citing such things as greater need for structure and clarification of expectations, more attention to reading and communication skills, more personalized contact, and a slower pace in classwork.

At present, we have insufficient information on how the early college experience effects student academic and psychological development. Results from the 1972, 1973, and 1974 CLEP(academic achievement) testing which students take part in at the end of their

second year at Simon's Rock indicate that our students score on the average close to the 70th percentile of college sophomore norms. We are currently in the process of analyzing data on the degree of change in psychological maturity during the first three years at Simon's Rock. Based on information from other sources where ego development in college students has been studied, it seems reasonable to conclude that change in the early college years is characteristically from the lowest to mid-levels of maturity. Shifts towards the highest levels of maturity, which are characterized by autonomous behavior and principled, moral thought, don't occur until very late in the college sequence, that is, between the junior and senior years, if at all. As for Simon's Rock students, although we tend to get more immature, lower stage students at entrance than other colleges, there is no indication as yet that our students are lagging behind in developmental change compared with other college students. However, we do not yet have the crucial senior data to see if we are getting the same developmental spurt between the junior and senior years that has appeared elsewhere. Because of student attrition at Simon's Rock after the second year, it will probably require at least two to three more years of tracking students before we will have sufficient change data from which to draw solid conclusions.